Second typhoon in a week displaces over one million in Philippines

TUGUEGARAO CITY: Entire villages lay submerged, and scores of towns remained without electricity on Monday as Typhoon Fung-wong left the Philippines after killing at least five people and displacing more than a million.

Fung-wong, with a footprint that spanned nearly the entire archipelago, slammed into the eastern seaboard as a "super typhoon" on Sunday evening, uprooting trees and swamping towns in its path.

It landed a week after Typhoon Kalmaegi swept through the islands of the central Philippines, killing at least 224 people.

Cleanup efforts were underway on Monday from Cagayan province in the far north to hard-hit Catanduanes island, more than 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) to the south.

In Cagayan, provincial rescue chief Rueli Rapsing said a flash flood in neighbouring Apayao province had caused the Chico River to burst its banks, sending nearby residents scrambling for higher ground.

"We received reports around six in the morning ... that some people were already on their roofs," he said.

Most had been rescued, but a verified video shows that some were still trapped.

Mark Lamer, 24, a resident of Cagayan's Tuao town, said it was the "strongest typhoon I have ever experienced".

"We didn't think the water would reach us. It had never risen this high previously," he said.

More than 5,000 people were safely evacuated before the overflowing Cagayan River buried the small city of Tuguegarao about 30 kilometres (20 miles) away.

"Tuguegarao is underwater now," Rapsing said.

A local mayor's office said the Cagayan River was still rising by about 0.3 metres (one foot) every hour.—AFP

A VILLAGER sits near her flood-hit house in Tuao after a river overflowed due to heavy rains brought by Super Typhoon Fung-wong.—AFP

Trump pardons Giuliani over charges linked to poll subversion

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has granted sweeping pardons to top allies accused of attempting to subvert the 2020 election, the administration's pardon attorney Ed Martin said on Sunday.

Martin shared a list on X of more than 70 people, including the president's former lawyers Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell, and Trump's former chief of staff Mark Meadows, who were granted "full, complete and unconditional" pardons.

The names on the list were embroiled in a scheme to alter slates of electors in battleground states, including Arizona, Georgia, and Michigan, which Joe Biden had secured in his successful 2020 presidential run.

That plot, supported by Trump and his allies, helped fuel a demonstration that turned into a rioting mob attacking the US Capitol on January 6, 2021.

None of those named in the four-page pardons missive were charged on the federal level, but the directive could prevent future administrations from prosecuting the alleged co-conspirators.

The names also include John Eastman, a lawyer who proposed strategies to prevent the certification of the election results, and longtime Trump advisor Boris Epshteyn.

Trump has long insisted he has the power to pardon himself for federal crimes, but he has yet to put the theory to the test.

In the missive granting pardons for actions "in connection with the 2020 Presidential Election" or relating to "efforts to expose voting fraud," Trump said that "this pardon does not apply to the President of the United States."—AFP

US Senate deal sets stage for end to shutdown

WASHINGTON: The longest government shutdown in US history could end this week after a compromise that would restore federal funding cleared an initial Senate hurdle late on Sunday, though it was unclear when Congress would give its final approval.

The deal would restore funding for federal agencies that lawmakers allowed to expire on Oct 1, bringing welcome relief to low-income families that have seen food subsidies disrupted, hundreds of thousands of federal workers who have gone unpaid for more than a month and travellers who have faced thousands of cancelled flights.

It would extend funding through Jan 30, leaving the federal government for now on a path to keep adding about $1.8 trillion a year to its $38tr in debt.

President Donald Trump's Republicans hold majorities in both chambers of Congress, but Democrats used rules that require 60 of the 100 senators to agree on most legislation, in a push for an extension of health insurance subsidies for 24 million Americans that are due to expire at the end of the year. The Senate compromise would set up a vote on that measure next month.

Coming a week after Democrats won high-profile elections in New Jersey, Virginia and elected democratic socialist as the next mayor of New York City, the Sunday votes by eight moderate Democrats to advance the deal provoked anger among many in the party who noted there was no guarantee that vote would pass the Senate or House of Representatives.

Moderate Democrats broker deal

Sunday's deal was brokered by Democratic Senators Maggie Hassan and Jeanne Shaheen, both from New Hampshire, and Senator Angus King, an independent from Maine, said a source.

"For over a month, I've made clear that my priorities are to both reopen government and extend the enhanced premium tax credits. This is our best path toward accomplishing both of these goals," Shaheen posted on X.

Democrats have struggled this year to mount an effective opposition to Trump, who is backed by Republican majorities in both chambers of Congress and a conservative majority on the Supreme Court.

A poll found last month that 50 per cent of Americans blamed Republicans for the shutdown, while 43pc blamed Democrats.

Trump has unilaterally cancelled billions of dollars in spending and trimmed federal payrolls by hundreds of thousands of workers, intruding on Congress's constitutional authority over fiscal matters.

Those actions have violated past spending laws passed by Congress, and some Democrats have questioned why they would vote for any such spending deals going forward. Stocks rose on Monday, buoyed by news of progress on a deal to reopen the government.

The deal does not appear to include any specific guardrails to prevent Trump from enacting further spending cuts.

However, it would stall his campaign to downsize the federal workforce, prohibiting him from firing employees until Jan 30.

Many steps remain before the deal can become law.—Reuters

Six killed in US strikes on alleged drug boats in Pacific

WASHINGTON: The United States struck two alleged drug-carrying vessels in the eastern Pacific Ocean on Sunday, killing six people on board, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said on Monday, as calls mounted for investigations into the strikes.

"These vessels were known by our intelligence to be associated with illicit narcotics smuggling, were carrying narcotics, and were transiting along a known narco-trafficking transit route," Hegseth said in a post on X, which included a video of the boats being struck.

The US has carried out more than a dozen strikes since September on vessels near the Venezuelan coast and, more recently, in the eastern Pacific Ocean, killing more than 70 people, according to the US defence secretary, as it escalates a military buildup in the Caribbean Sea.

The US has alleged, without presenting evidence, that the boats it bombed were transporting drugs, but foreign leaders, some members of Congress, legal experts, and family members of those killed have called for proof.

The United Nations has called the US strikes on alleged drug dealers unacceptable and a violation of international human rights law.—Reuters

Three survive 40 hours at sea after storm

HANOI: Three men swept far from Vietnam's coast by Typhoon Kalmaegi have been plucked safely from the surf after drifting helplessly for more than 40 hours, a rescuer and the wife of one of the survivors said on Monday. They were rescued over several hours on Saturday in an operation involving three vessels scouring the waters off Vietnam's central coast, according to a sailor aboard one of the rescue ships.

Kalmaegi crashed into the country's storm-battered middle belt on Thursday, killing at least five people after leaving more than 200 dead in the Philippines.

Phan Hau, 40, whose boat pulled one of the three men to safety, said: "We were completely stunned — it felt miraculous." "None of us thought (he) could still be alive. Most of the 10 of us on board believed we were only searching for his body, not that he'd still be breathing." State media reported the three men went missing on Thursday afternoon after one of them, 44-year-old Duong Quang Cuong, jumped into the water after a family dispute.

Le Quang Sanh and Pham Duy Quang rowed out with life jackets in a tiny boat to try to rescue Cuong, but the vessel overturned and all three were carried far from shore, eventually becoming separated.—AFP

The artificial intelligence revolution has a power problem

SAN FRANCISCO: In the race for AI dominance, American tech giants have the money and the chips, but their ambitions have hit a new obstacle: electricity.

"The biggest issue we are now having is not a compute glut, but it's the power and...the ability to get the builds done fast enough close to power," Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella acknowledged on a recent podcast with OpenAI chief Sam Altman.

"So if you can't do that, you may actually have a bunch of chips sitting in inventory that I can't plug in," Nadella added.

Echoing the 1990s dotcom frenzy to build internet infrastructure, today's tech giants are spending unprecedented sums to construct the silicon backbone of the revolution in artificial intelligence.

Google, Microsoft, AWS (Amazon), and Meta (Facebook) are drawing on their massive cash reserves to spend roughly $400 billion in 2025 and even more in 2026 — backed for now by enthusiastic investors.

All this cash has helped alleviate one initial bottleneck: acquiring the millions of chips needed for the computing power race. The tech giants are accelerating their in-house processor production as they seek to catch up with global leader Nvidia. These will go into the racks that fill the massive data centers, which also consume enormous amounts of water for cooling.

Building the massive information warehouses takes an average of two years in the United States; bringing new high-voltage power lines into service takes five to 10 years.

Energy wall

The "hyperscalers," as major tech companies are called in Silicon Valley, saw the energy wall coming.

A year ago, Virginia's main utility provider, Dominion Energy, already had a data-center order book of 40 gigawatts — equivalent to the output of 40 nuclear reactors.

The capacity it must deploy in Virginia, the world's largest cloud computing hub, has since risen to 47 gigawatts, the company announced recently.

Already blamed for inflating household electricity bills, data centers in the United States could account for 7 percent to 12 percent of national consumption by 2030, up from 4 percent today, according to various studies.

But some experts say the projections could be overblown.

"Both the utilities and the tech companies have an incentive to embrace the rapid growth forecast for electricity use," Jonathan Koomey, a renowned expert from UC Berkeley, warned in September.

As with the late 1990s internet bubble, "many data centers that are talked about and proposed and in some cases even announced will never get built."

Emergency coal

If the projected growth does materialise, it could create a 45-gigawatt shortage by 2028 — equivalent to the consumption of 33 million American households, according to Morgan Stanley.

Several US utilities have already delayed the closure of coal plants, despite coal being the most climate-polluting energy source.

And natural gas, which powers 40 percent of data centers worldwide, according to the International Energy Agency, is experiencing renewed favor because it can be deployed quickly.

In the US state of Georgia, where data centers are multiplying, one utility has requested authorization to install 10 gigawatts of gas-powered generators.—AFP

NEWSMAKERS

WASHINGTON: A Jan 12, 2016, file picture shows Kim Davis (centre), a county clerk in Kentucky, arriving at the US Capitol before president Barack Obama's State of the Union address. The US Supreme Court declined on Monday to hear a case brought by Kim Davis challenging the constitutional right to same-sex marriage. The conservative-dominated court did not provide any explanation for its decision to reject the case.—AFP

KABUL: An Afghan boy rides a horse at Qargha Lake, on the outskirts of the capital.—AFP

BRATISLAVA: Greenpeace activists display a banner reading "closed today" during a protest at the entrance to Slovakia's environment ministry.—Reuters

PEOPLE stand next to a centuries-old shipwreck uncovered in the aftermath of Typhoon Kalmaegi last week.—AFP

Hurricane exposes centuries-old shipwreck off Vietnam port

HOI AN: Severe coastal erosion caused by Typhoon Kalmaegi exposed a centuries-old shipwreck in Vietnam, providing a narrow window to salvage what experts say could be a historically significant find. Initially discovered in 2023 off the coast of Hoi An, the at least 17.4-metre (57-foot) vessel — whose heavy wood-ribbed hull survived hundreds of years of rough seas almost perfectly intact — was resubmerged before authorities could reclaim it.

Experts have not yet dated the wreck, but preliminary findings suggest it was built between the 14th and 16th centuries — when UNESCO-listed Hoi An was at the centre of a thriving regional trade in silk, ceramics, and spices. "We are currently preparing to apply for an emergency excavation (permit)," Pham Phu Ngoc, director of the Hoi An Center for the Preservation of World Cultural Heritage, said on Monday after the wreck resurfaced following the passage of Typhoon Kalmaegi last week.

"The discovery of this ancient ship is clear evidence of Hoi An's significant historical role in regional trade," he said, adding that more of the ship had been exposed this time, which could provide us with more information.

A team of experts from the Hoi An preservation centre, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Ho Chi Minh City, and a local museum surveyed the wreck last year.—AFP

BELEM: New Zealand's former prime minister Jacinda Ardern (centre) poses for a snapshot with attendees to the COP30 UN Climate Change Conference in Brazil.—AFP

MAGDEBURG: Court officials escort Saudi Arabian defendant Taleb Al Abdulmohsen towards a helicopter (unseen) after he left a courthouse in eastern Germany. Taleb was put on trial on Monday over a deadly Christmas market attack in this city in December last year. The medical doctor is accused of driving an SUV through the market in a rampage which killed a nine-year-old boy and five women aged between 45 and 75.—AFP